



# Training ignites first Afghan Army demining operation

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**KABUL, Afghanistan**—The Afghan National Army recently put their training to use as they successfully conducted the first ANA-led demining operation in Afghanistan. The mission highlighted not only the expanding military capabilities of the ANA, but also the commitment of the government to achieve a mine-free Afghanistan for future generations.

With the approval of the Afghan Ministry of Defense, the ANA leadership took charge and organized two days of real-world demining operations at the Area Military Depot of Pol-e-Charkhi, a hazardous area identified as containing mines by HALO Trust, the British-based non-governmental organization dedicated to humanitarian mine clearing.

Safety was emphasized over speed, with the operation occurring in a secured environment under daylight conditions. A medical evacuation team was on site as well.

The demining operation consisted of three main areas: the entry control point, the demining zone and the company area



Photos by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria Meyer

**An Afghan National Army first-degree deminer carefully conducts mine search operations using an entrenching tool. Each demining buddy team worked in a corridor 80 centimeters wide.**

of operations.

At the entry control point, each two-man demining buddy team was provided a safety briefing, issued protective gear and listed on an accountability roster by name and blood type.

Each buddy team was comprised of a first-degree and a second-degree deminer. First-degree deminers are qualified to conduct the mine search and initial detection. Second-degree

deminers, who are also qualified as instructors, identify and determine which neutralization method is best for disabling each mine or munition. The company leadership provided the overall command and control for the operation.

In the demining zone, three two-man buddy teams were positioned 50 meters apart and worked in corridors 80 centimeters wide. Since manual demining can be tedious, repetitive and dangerous,



**The dust settles after an improvised explosive device is destroyed in a controlled detonation. The IED was found during demining operations conducted by the Afghan National Army at the Pol-e-Charkhi area depot.**

the teams were rotated every 20 minutes as a safety precaution.

During the second day of the operation, the Afghan deminers discovered an improvised explosive device and a Russian anti-personnel mine.

Applying their knowledge and training, the deminers quickly assessed the situation and determined that the IED could be safely detonated in place. The anti-personnel mine was appropriately marked and left in place for later destruction.

The confidence and elation of the deminers were evident as they cheered and applauded their first live detonation, yet the gravity of their work as deminers remained with them.

“Getting the soldiers to work in a real minefield immediately after training was essential to instill the courage and confidence needed to do their job,” said French Army Capt. Thierry Sagon, the primary instructor for the demining training.

Only two months prior, 90 members of the engineer company from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 201<sup>st</sup> Corps’ 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Kandak (Battalion) completed advanced demining training and earned their ratings as first and second-degree deminers.

The training was conducted by members of the French Army’s Engineer Mobile Training Team as part of Operation Epidote, the name France has given to its entire training mission in Afghanistan.

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***-- Capt. Shenwari Hanifullah  
Engineer Company Commander***

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“It was very necessary for the Afghan Army to be involved today and to show that they can learn and execute technical skills,” said Lt. Col. Gaetan Sevin, chief of the French training team. “We do not alter our standards of training. The Afghan soldiers are trained just as we are in France. We are very pleased with the outcome and have much confidence in the abilities of the soldiers.”

Notably, the 4<sup>th</sup> Kandak’s Engineer Company was the first ANA unit to complete the comprehensive two-month demining training where they mastered the drills and procedures needed to work in a live minefield by training in difficult and realistic situations.

The training focused on the following areas: mine identification, detection, clearance, neutralization and removal methods, enabling the students to identify 60 various types of munitions and 35 types of mines.

“I am very happy our soldiers were able to get professional demining training,” said Lt. Col. Aminjan, commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Kandak. “Last year, our unit deployed to the Ghazni province and


could do nothing when we faced real minefields and explosive materials. Thanks to the French trainers and Coalition forces, we now have the skills and moral courage to locate and neutralize the mines to help protect our people.”

The French instructors lead the way in ANA demining training with support and donations from Coalition forces and other non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan.

Despite progress made by mine action organizations, Afghanistan still remains heavily contaminated by mines and other explosive remnants from years of war. These mines continue to have a devastating effect on the Afghan people and impede economic development.

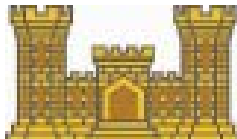
“Today was not about just finding mines or munitions, but rather their ability to apply their knowledge and skills in a real-world environment,” Sagon said. “They organized and executed the operation in entirety. They did a great job.”

The demining mission marked a huge step and a new direction in operational abilities for the ANA.

“The training and today’s demining operation will help us in our military duties,” said Capt. Shenwari Hanifullah, the engineer company commander. “More importantly, it will help us to protect the people of Afghanistan.” 



**Left:** Prior to entering the demining area, an ANA first-degree deminer from the 4<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Kandak (Battalion) Engineer Company inspects a mine-detecting sensor used to locate buried landmines.



**Right:** Members of an Afghan National Army demining buddy team communicate prior to conducting mine clearing operations.



Photos by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Victoria Meyer